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OF THE CULTURE OF WHITE FOLK

By W. E. Burghardt Du Bois, Ph. D., Editor of the Crisis

We, of the darker peoples, are watching the white world now in mild amaze. Among some of us, I doubt not, this sudden descent of Europe into hell has brought unbounded surprise; to others, over wide area, it has brought the *schaden freude* of the bitterly hurt. But most of us, I judge, look on silently and sorrowfully, in sober thought, seeing sadly the prophecy of our own souls.

Here is a civilization that has boasted much. Neither Roman nor Arab, Greek nor Egyptian, Persian nor Mogul ever took himself and his own perfectness with such disconcerting seriousness as the modern white man. We, whose shame, humiliation and deep insult, his aggrandizement involved, were never deceived. We looked at him clearly with world-old eyes and saw simply a human thing, weak and pitiable and cruel, even as we are and were.

These super-men and world-mastering demi-gods listened, however, to no low tongues of ours, even when we pointed silently to their feet of clay. Perhaps we, as folk of simpler souls and more primitive type, have been most struck in the welter of recent years by the utter failure of white religion. We have curled our lips in something like contempt as we witnessed glib apology and weary explanation. Nothing of the sort deceived us. A nation's religion is its life and as such white Christianity is a miserable failure.

Nor would we be unfair in this criticism: We know that we too have failed as you have, and have rejected many a Buddha even as you have denied Christ. But we acknowledge our human frailty while you, claiming super-humanity, scoff endlessly at our shortcomings.

What Christian nations are today treating other nations as they would be treated, except they fear the other nation's guns? Is not this the taunt daily flung in the face of the

peace-makers? Is not this the reason that Europe, which now spends two and one-third billions of dollars a year in normal days of peace, has wasted in war stuff during the last century enough wealth to forward to approximate if not complete success most of our great modern movements in education, health preservation, child welfare, housing, and the like?

Or if we pass within the nation's life and take the attitude of social classes, how much of Christian charity is there today between the haves and have-nots, the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor, the intelligent and the ignorant; some bonds there are, and much knowledge and helping; but self-defense, fastidious disapproval and armed truce describes the mutual attitude far more accurately than human love. The cumulated wrath of some submerged tenth, the fear of the police, the hatred of ugliness next our beauty—these are the motives we continually see and hear.

The number of white individuals who are practicing with even reasonable approximation the democracy and unselfishness of Jesus Christ is so small and unimportant as to be fit subject for jest in Sunday supplements and in *Punch*, *Life*, *Le Rire* and *Fliegende Blätter*. In her foreign mission work the extraordinary self-deception of white religion is epitomized: Solemnly the white world sends five million dollars worth of missionary propaganda to Africa each year and in the same twelve months adds ten million dollars worth of the vilest rum manufactured; peace to the augurs of Rome!

We may, however, grant without argument that religious ideals have always far outrun their very human devotees; let us then turn to more mundane matters of honor and fairness. The world today is trade. The world has turned shopkeeper; history is economic history; living is earning a living. Is it necessary to ask how much high emprise and honorable conduct has been found here? Something to be sure. The establishment of world credit systems is built on splendid and realizable faith in fellowmen. But it is after all so low and elementary a step that sometimes

it looks merely like honor among thieves, for the revelations of highway robbery and low cheating in the business world and in all its great modern centers has raised in the hearts of all true men in our day an exceeding great cry for revolution in our basic methods and conception of industry and commerce.

We do not for a moment forget the robbery of other times and races, when trade was a most uncertain gamble; but was there not a certain honesty and frankness in evil that argued a saner morality? Surely there are more merchants today and surer deliveries and wider well-being, but are there not also bigger thieves, and deeper injustice and more calloused selfishness in well-being? Be that as it may, certainly the nicer sense of honor that has risen ever and again in groups of forward thinking men has been curiously and broadly blunted. Consider our chiefest industry—fighting. Laboriously the Middle Ages built its rules of fairness—equal armament, equal notice, equal conditions. What do we see today? Machine guns against assegais, conquest sugared with religion, mutilation and rape masquerading as culture: all this with vast applause at the superiority of white over black soldiers!

War is horrible. This the dark world knows to its awful cost. But has it just become horrible in these last days, when under essentially equal conditions, equal armament and equal waste of wealth, white men are fighting white men with surgeons and nurses hovering near?

Think of the wars through which we have lived in the last little decade: In German Africa, in British Nigeria, in French and Spanish Morocco, in China, in Persia, in the Balkans, in Tripoli, and Mexico and a dozen lesser places—were these not horrible too? Mind you, there were for most of these wars no Red Cross funds!

Behold little Belgium and her pitiable plight; but has the world forgotten Congo? What Belgium now suffers is not half, nor even a tenth of what she has done to Black Congo since Stanley's great dream of 1880. Down the dark forests of inmost Africa sailed this modern Sir Galahad in the name of "the noble-minded men of several nations"

to introduce commerce and civilization. What came of it? "Rubber and murder, slavery in its worst form," wrote Glave in 1895. The whole story is too terrible to recite even in these days of terrible things.

Yet the fields of Belgium laughed, the cities were gay; art and science flourished; the groans that helped to nourish this civilization fell on deaf ears because the world round about was doing this same sort of thing elsewhere on its own account.

As we see the dead dimly through rifts of battle smoke and hear faintly the cursing and accusations of blood brothers, we darker men say: This is not Europe gone mad; this is not aberration nor insanity; this *is* Europe; this seeming terrible is the real soul of white culture—back of all culture, stripped and visible today. This is where the world has arrived—these dark and awful depths and not the shining and ineffable heights we boasted of. Here is whither the might and energy of modern humanity has really gone.

But may not the world cry back at us and ask: What better thing have you to show? What have you done or would do better than this if you had today the world rule? Paint with all riot of hateful colors the thin skin of European culture, is it not better than any culture that arose in Africa or Asia?

It is. Of this there is no doubt and never has been; but why is it better? Is it better because Europeans are better, nobler, greater and more gifted than other folk? It is not. Europe has never produced, and never will in our day, a single human soul that cannot be matched, aye, and over matched in every line of human endeavor by Asia and Africa. Run the gamut, if you will, and let us have the Europeans who in sober truth over-match black Nefartari, Mohammed, Rameses and Askia, Confucius, Buddha and Jesus Christ? If we could scan the calendar of thousands of lesser men in like comparison the result would be the same; but we cannot do this because of the deliberately educated ignorance of white schools by which they remember Napoleon and forget Sonni Ali.

The greatness of Europe has lain in the width of the stage

on which she played her part, and the strength of the foundations on which she builded and a natural human ability no whit greater, if as great, as that of other days and races.

In other words the deeper reasons for the triumph of European civilization lie quite outside and beyond Europe, back in the universal struggles of all mankind.

Why then is Europe great? Because of the foundations which the mighty past has furnished her to build upon: The iron and trade of black Africa; the religion and empire-building of yellow Asia; the art and science of the "dago" Mediterranean shore east, south and west as well as north. And where she has builded securely upon this great past and learned from it she has gone forward to greater and more splendid human triumph; but where she has ignored that past and forgotten and sneered at it she has shown the cloven hoof of poor crucified humanity; she has played, like other empires gone, the world fool.

If then European triumphs in culture have been greater, so too may her failures. How great a failure and a failure in what does this world war betoken? Is it national jealousy of the sort the seventeenth century knew so well? But Europe has done more to break down national barriers than any preceding culture. Was it fear of the balance of power in Europe? Hardly, save in the half-Asiatic problems of the Balkans. What then does Hauptmann mean when he says: "Our jealous enemies forged an iron ring around our breasts, and we knew our breasts had to expand; that it had to split asunder this ring or else we had to cease breathing. But Germany will not cease to breathe, and so it came to pass that the iron ring was forced apart."

Whither is this expansion? What is that breath of life thought to be so indispensable to a great European nation?

Manifestly it is expansion over-seas—it is colonial aggrandizement which explains, and alone adequately explains the present war. How many of us today fully realize the current theory of colonial expansion—of the relation of Europe, which is white, to the rest of the world, which is black and brown and yellow? Bluntly put that

theory is this: It is the duty of white Europe to divide up the darker world and administer it for Europe's good. This Europe has largely done.

The European world is using black men and brown for all the uses which men know. Slowly but surely white culture is evolving the theory that "darkies" are born beasts of burden for white folk. It were silly to think otherwise, cries the culture world with stronger and shriller accord. The supporting arguments grow and twist themselves in the mouths of merchant, scientist, soldier, traveler, writer and missionary: Darker peoples are dark in mind as well as in body; of dark, uncertain and imperfect descent, of frailer, cheaper stuff; they are cowards in the face of mausers and maxims; they have no feelings, aspirations and loves; they are fools, unlogical idiots, "half devil and half child."

Such as they are, civilization must naturally raise them, but soberly and in limited ways. They are not simply dark white men. They are not "men" in the sense that Europeans are men. To the very limited extent of their shallow capacities lift them to be useful to whites; to raise cotton, gather rubber, fetch ivory, dig diamonds; and let them be paid what men think they are worth—white men who know them to be well-nigh worthless.

Such degrading of men by men is old as mankind and the invention of no one race or people; ever have men strove to conceive of their victims as different from the victors, endlessly different in soul and blood, strength and cunning, race and lineage. It has been left, however, to Europe and to modern days to discover the eternal world-wide mark of meanness—color.

Such is the silent revolution that has gripped modern European culture in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Its zenith came in Boxer times: White supremacy was all but world-wide: Africa was dead India conquered, Japan isolated and China prostrate, while white America whetted its sword for mongrel Mexico and mulatto South America, lynching her own Negroes the while. Temporary halt in this program was made by little Japan,

and the white world immediately sensed the peril of such "yellow" presumption. What sort of a world would this be if yellow men must be treated "white?" Immediately the eventual overthrow of Japan became a subject of deep thought and intrigue from St. Petersburg to San Francisco, from the Key of Heaven to the Little Brother of the Poor!

The using of men for the benefit of masters is no new invention of modern Europe. It is quite as old as the world. But Europe is proposing to apply it on a scale and with an elaborateness of detail of which no former world ever dreamed. The imperial width of the thing—the heaven-defying audacity makes its modern newness.

The scheme of Europe was no sudden invention but a way out of long, pressing difficulties. It is plain to modern white civilization that the subjection of the white working classes cannot much longer be maintained. Education, political power and increased knowledge of the technique and meaning of the industrial process is destined to make a more and more equitable distribution of wealth in the near future. The day of the very rich is drawing to a close so far as individual white nations are concerned. But there is a loophole. There is a chance for exploitation on an immense scale; for inordinate profit, not simply to the very rich, but to the middle class and the laborers. This chance lies in the exploitation of darker peoples. It is here that the Golden Hand still beckons; there are no labor unions or votes or questioning onlookers or inconvenient consciences. There men may be used down to the bone and shot and maimed in "punitive" expeditions when they revolt; in these dark lands "industrial development" may repeat in exaggerated form every horror of the industrial history of Europe from slavery and rape to disease and maiming with only one test of success: dividends.

This theory of human culture and its aims has worked itself through warp and woof of our daily thought with a thoroughness that few realize. Everything great, good, efficient, fair and honorable is "white." Everything mean, bad, blundering, cheating and dishonorable is "yellow," brown and black. The changes on this theme are contin-

ually rung in picture and story, in newspaper heading and moving picture, in sermon and school book until, of course, the king can do no wrong—a white man is always right, and the black has no rights which a white man is bound to respect.

There must come the necessary despisings and hatreds of these savage half men, this unclean canaille of the world—these dogs of men. All through the world this gospel is preaching; it has its literature, it has its priests, it has its secret propaganda and above all—it pays.

There's the rub: It pays. Rubber, ivory and palm oil; tea, coffee and cocoa; bananas, oranges and other fruit; cotton, gold and copper—they and a hundred other things which dark and sweating bodies hand up to the white world from their pits of slime pay and pay well; but of all that world the black world gets only the pittance that the white wealth throws it disdainfully.

Small wonder then, in the practical world of things-that-be, there is jealousy and strife for the possession of the labor of dark millions—for the right to bleed and exploit the colonies of the world where this golden stream may be had, not always for the asking, but surely for the whipping and shooting. It is this competition for the labor of yellow, brown and black folk that is the cause of the present world war.

Other causes have been glibly given and other contributing causes there doubtless are, but they are subsidiary to this, subordinate to this vast quest of the dark world's wealth and toil.

Colonies we call them, these places where “niggers” are cheap and earth is rich; they are those out-lands where like a swarm of hungry locusts white masters may settle to be served as kings; may wield the lash of slave drivers, may rape girls and wives, grow rich as Croesus and send homeward a golden stream. They belt the earth, these places, but they cluster in the tropics with its darkened peoples: in Hong Kong and Anam, in Borneo and Rhodesia, in Sierra Leone and Nigeria, in Panama and Havana—these are the El Dorados toward which the world powers stretch itching palms.

Germany, at last one and united, secure on land, looked across the seas and saw England with such sources of wealth insuring a luxury and power which Germany could not hope to rival by the slower processes of exploiting her own peasants and workingmen, especially with these workers half in revolt. Immediately Germany builds her navy and enters into a desperate competition for possession of colonies of darker peoples. To South America, to China, to Africa, to Asia Minor, she turns like a hound quivering on the leash, impatient, suspicious, irritable with blood-shot eyes and dripping fangs, ready for the awful word. England and France crouch watchfully above their bones growling and wary, but gnawing industriously while the blood of the dark world whets their greedy appetites. In the back ground, shut out from the feast and from the highway to the Seven Seas, sit Russia and Austria, snarling and snapping at each other and at the last Mediterranean gate to El Dorado where the Sick Man enjoys bad health.

The fateful day came. It had to come. The cause of war is preparation for war, and of all that Europe has done in a century there is nothing that has equaled in energy, thought and time her preparation for wholesale murder. The only adequate cause of this preparation was conquest and conquest not in Europe, but primarily among the darker peoples of Asia and Africa; conquest not for assimilation and uplift, but for commerce and degradation. For this, and this mainly, has Europe girded herself at frightful cost for war.

The red day dawned when the tinder was lighted in the Balkans and Austro-Hungary seized a bit which brought her a step nearer the World's Highway; seized one bit and poised herself for another. Then came that curious chorus of challenges, those leaping suspicions, raking all causes for distrust and rivalry and hatred, but saying little of the present and greatest cause.

Each nation felt its deep interests involved. But how? Not surely in the death of Ferdinand the Warlike; not surely in the old half forgotten *revanche* for Alsace-Lorraine, not even in the neutrality of Belgium. No! But

in the possession of lands overseas; in the right to colonies, the chance to levy endless tribute on the darker world, on coolies in China, on starving peasants of India, on black savages of Africa, on dying South Sea Islanders, on Indians of the Amazon—all this and nothing more.

Even the broken reed on which we had rested high hopes of eternal peace—the guild of the laborers, the front of that very movement for human justice on which we builded most—even this flew like a straw before the breath of king and kaiser. Indeed, the flying had been foreshadowed when in Germany and America “International” Socialists had all but read yellow and black men out of the kingdom of industrial justice. Subtly had they been bribed but effectively: Were they not lordly whites and should they not share in the spoils of rape? High wages in the United States and England might be the skillfully manipulated result of slavery in Africa and peonage in Asia.

Why must entrance on world markets depend so largely on owning “colonies” and dominating weaker countries? Why not freedom of world-trade and open markets? Because one can do with one’s own and in the darkness what cannot be done in open concert of nations with the flare of publicity and maudlin philanthropy. Who asked or knew what went on in German South West Africa a few years ago? Who for twenty years dreamed of the hell in Belgian Congo? How easily the shame of the diamond mines of South Africa escapes notice. Then too, with open competition, the best might win—the best employer, the highest bidder, the fairest payer; this did not suit national selfishness. With the dog in-the-manger theory of trade, with the determination to reap inordinate profits and to exploit the weakest to the utmost, there came the new imperialism, the rage for one’s own nations to own the earth, or at least a large enough portion to insure as big profits as the next nation. Where sections could not be owned by one dominant nation there came a policy of “Open Door,” but the “Door” was open “to white people only.” As to the darkest and weakest people there was but one unanimity in Europe—that which Herr Dernberg of the German Co-

lonial Office calls the agreement with England to maintain white "prestige" in Africa—the doctrine of the divine right of whites to steal.

Thus the world market most wildly and desperately sought today is the market where labor is cheapest and most helpless and profit most abundant. This labor is kept cheap and helpless because the white world despises "darkies." If one has the temerity to suggest that these workingmen may walk the way of white workingmen and climb by votes and self-assertion and education to the rank of men, he is howled out of court. They cannot do it and if they could they shall not, for they are the enemies of the white race and the whites shall rule forever and forever everywhere! Thus hatred and despising of human beings from whom Europe wishes to extort her luxuries had led to such jealousy and bickering between European nations that they have fallen afoul of each other and are fighting today like crazed beasts. Such is the fruit of human hatred.

But what of the darker world that watches? Most men belong to this world. With Negro and Negroid, East Indian, Chinese and Japanese they form two-thirds the population of the world. A belief in humanity is a belief in colored men. If the uplift of mankind must be done by men then the destinies of this world will rest ultimately in the hands of darker nations.

What then, is this dark world thinking? It is thinking that wild and awful as this shameful war is *it is nothing to compare with that fight for freedom which black and brown and yellow men must and will make unless their oppression and humiliation and insult at the hands of the White World cease. The dark world is going to submit to its present treatment just as long as it has to and not one moment longer.*

Let me say this again and emphasize it and leave no room for mistaken meaning: This world war is primarily the jealous and avaricious struggle for the largest share in exploiting darker races. As such it is and must be but prelude to the armed and the indignant protest of these despised and raped peoples. Today Japan is hammering on the

door of Justice; China is raising her half-manacled hands to knock next; India is writhing for the freedom to knock; Egypt is sullenly muttering; the Negroes of South and West Africa, of the West Indies and the United States are just awakening to their shameful slavery. Is then this war the end of war? Can it be the end so long as its prime cause, the despising and robbery of darker peoples sits enthroned even in the souls of those who cry peace? So if Europe hugs this delusion then this is not the end of world war—it is the beginning.

We see Europe's greatest sin precisely where we find Africa's and Asia's, in human hatred—the despising of men. With this difference, however: Europe has the awful lesson of the past before her, has the splendid results of widened areas of tolerance, sympathy and love among men, and she faces a greater, an infinitely greater world of men than any preceding civilization ever faced.

It is curious to see America, the United States, looking on herself as a sort of natural peacemaker in this terrible time. No nation is less fitted. For two or more centuries she has marched proudly in the van of human hatred. She makes bonfires of human flesh and laughs at it hideously. She makes the insulting of millions more than a matter of dislike—it becomes a great religion, a world war cry: Up white, down black; to your tents, O white folk and world war with black and parti-colored mongrel beasts! Instead of standing as a great example of the success of democracy and the possibility of human brotherhood America has taken her place as an awful example of its pitfalls and its failures, especially so far as black and yellow and brown people are concerned. And this too, in spite of the fact that there was no actual failure; the Indian is not dying out, the Japanese and Chinese have not menaced the land, and the experiment of Negro suffrage has resulted in the uplift of ten million people at a rate probably unparalleled in history. But what of this? America, land of democracy, wanted to believe in the failure of democracy so far as darker peoples were concerned. Absolutely without excuse she established a caste system, rushed into preparation

for war and conquered tropical colonies. She stands to-day shoulder to shoulder with Europe in Europe's worst sins against civilization. She aspires to sit among the great nations who arbitrate the fate of "lesser breeds without the law" and she is at times heartily ashamed even of the large number of "new" white people whom her democracy has admitted to place and power. Against this surging forward of Irish and German, of Russian Jew, Slav and "dago" her social bars have not availed, but against Negroes she can and does take her unflinching and immovable stand, backed by this new public policy of Europe. She trains her immigrants to this despising of "niggers" from the day of their landing, and they carry and send the news back to the submerged classes of their fatherlands.

I shall never forget a meeting of the New York Peace Society in the Hotel Astor at the outbreak of war in the Balkans. Contempt for the weaker, lesser, blacker peoples sat enthroned. All that the society asked for was peace among the big dogs of the white world while they hunted the lesser ones. "We want peace," said a distinguished president, known in all lands as peacemaker, "for nations that deserve peace;" and the audience wildly applauded the war paean of a Servian "prince."

It was symptomatic. Peace among the mighty and let the lesser peoples writhe. So today. To many it is not war that alarms them; but the fact that those whites who should fight blacks are fighting each other.

The cause of war is preparation for war. Preparation for war has no reason today but greed. Greed sends Europe as a thief in the night to the homes of the darker peoples. They writhe in impotent agony; but the escape of Japan, and the rise of India and the unrest of Africa and black America all give hope of real peace: of peace built on world democracy, of equality of men of all races and color, and the damnation of all industrial organizations built on theft.

Above the smoke of battle, Brothers, looms a great hope. Is it your hope? I do not know. But it is my hope and it says: "Ho! *everyone* that thirsteth—come ye to the waters—"

white and black, yellow and brown, rich and poor, ugly and beautiful. If you do not want living waters of life free for these, brothers, you do not want peace—you love war. Of such is the culture of white folk; the will of the world is not so.